

THE GULL

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GOLDEN GATE BIRD ALLIANCE // VOL. 107 NO. 4 FALL 2023



THE MAGIC OF FALL MIGRATION

BY BRUCE MAST

It was a hot midafternoon in August, when my friends and I caught the most spectacular sight at Hayward Regional Shoreline. As soon as Frank's Dump came into view our eyes transfixed on thousands of peeps and larger shorebirds loafing on low salt pan islands and picking through shallow waters—Least and Western Sandpipers, Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers, Dowitchers, Willets, Marbled Godwits, Red Knots, Phalaropes, and a rocky shorebird trifecta of Surfbirds, Black Turnstones and Ruddy Turnstones.

CONTINUED on page 3

Western Sandpiper.
Bob Lewis





Northern Pintail, Mallard, American Wigeon.

Bob Gunderson

WELCOME TO THE ALLIANCE

BY GLENN PHILLIPS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Since our founding in 1917, we have been associated with the historical figure and naturalist John James Audubon. Even after changing our name back in 1948 from “Audubon Association of the Pacific” to “Golden Gate Audubon”, we continued to honor and memorialize Audubon for his beautiful artwork and contributions to public awareness of North American birds.

But as with all things, we learn and as a result, grow. Knowing what we now know of Audubon’s slaveholder and antiabolitionist history, I am proud of our organization for recognizing that changing our name

was not only necessary for building better community relationships and growing our membership, but also the right thing to do.

With that said, I want to welcome you all to—Golden Gate Bird Alliance.

As a whole, Golden Gate Bird Alliance embodies our legacy, mission, and values.

Golden Gate provides continuity with our organization’s past and honors our chapter’s geographic region and ecology. The strait connecting San Francisco Bay with the Pacific Ocean reminds us that our work at a local level has impacts far beyond our own backyard.

Bird explicitly conveys our mission. Early on in the renaming process, it became clear that one of the most important considerations for a new name was clarity and accessibility and by using “bird” in our name we hope we’ve achieved this, especially for those who know nothing about our organization.

Alliance implies collaboration by a broad community of people working together on behalf of birds and wildlife. Not only are we a part of a larger network of bird conservation organizations across the country, we also work alongside other environmental organizations, partner with local chapters, and depend on our own membership to grow and diversify to successfully achieve our mission.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for supporting us throughout this process and for your continued patience as we transition to Golden Gate Bird Alliance.

I would also be remiss in not properly recognizing the time and commitment of our volunteers who participated through our New Name Committee and focus groups, our Focus Group Facilitator Maureen Ladley, our members for voting in the new name, and our entire Golden Gate Bird Alliance community for moving forward with us into this new chapter.

We know the work doesn’t stop with this new name alone. As we continue to make steps toward removing the barriers to full participation in birding and local conservation efforts, I welcome you to join us on this journey.

In order to protect our local birds, wildlife, and habitat it’s going to take all of us. It’s going to take an alliance.

NEWS BRIEFS

Golden Gate Bird Alliance

After months of deliberation and outreach we officially changed our name to Golden Gate Bird Alliance (GGBA). During our Annual Member Meeting on August 17, 2023 at the David Brower Center, our members ratified the new name into existence with a ballot vote.

Elected Board Members

During the most recent Annual Member Meeting, members voted in our latest slate of Board Members including first elected term candidates; Brandy Deminna Ford, Tara McIntire, and Steve Powell and second elected term candidates; Blake Edgar, Susan MacWhorter, and Christine Okon.

Youth Education Partnership

We’ve developed a new partnership with YES, a community-based Richmond organization focused on getting kids and families outdoors. Our Youth Education and Outreach Manager Clay Anderson has been leading birding tours with YES during their Nature Day Outings.

Vortex Binoculars

We now have 10 pairs of high quality binoculars thanks to a donation by Vortex Optics. These Triumph HD 10x42’s are ready to make it into the hands of beginner birders! Stay tuned for more information on our lending library program so you can check these out.

FEATURES

FALL MIGRATION from page 1

Most of the birds in view had just made the journey from their nesting grounds on the Alaskan and Canadian coasts and tundra. They probably staged at the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and then transited to Fraser River mouth or another Pacific Northwest estuary. From there, there are no other estuaries capable of nourishing flocks of 100,000 to 1,000,000 migrating shorebirds until the birds reach San Francisco Bay. Most of the west coast shorebird flocks will pause here in fall and spring to refuel and many will spend the winter.

Shorebird migration in August is just part of the migration magic on the California coast. By September, neotropical migrant songbirds will be on the move, many of them making appearances at coastal migrant traps. Vaux's Swifts will congregate by the thousands in the abandoned chimneys at San Rafael's McNear Brickyard. Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks will congregate around Hawk Hill as they follow their songbird prey south, with the buteos following behind in October. Ducks and geese will start moving south, with the latest arrivals turning up in November after more northerly waters freeze over. In spring, the entire drama replays in reverse, with the first hummingbirds moving north already in January and February, while overwintering Cedar Waxwings linger until late May before pushing on to their mountain breeding grounds.



Cedar Waxwing.

Alan Krakauer



Mixed flock in flight.

Rick Lewis

The spectacle of migration becomes even more amazing as we learn more about how birds accomplish the feat.

The spectacle of migration becomes even more amazing as we learn more about how birds accomplish the feat. While some species can short-hop their way, others like Pacific-Golden Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwits, Red Knots, and even Blackpoll Warblers, fly thousands of miles over open ocean and inhospitable terrain. To fuel their long flights, these birds pack on fat, adding 50 percent or more of their lean body weight in the weeks leading up to migration. In flight, they can burn through their stored fat in just a few days, before resorting to lean muscle and digestive system tissues for fuel.

Their powers of navigation are uncanny. For daylight flight, the sun is a useful compass and birds' ability to detect polarized light helps them locate the sun's position on cloudy days. Experiments in planetariums have shown how nocturnal migrants can navigate by the stars. Birds can sense the earth's magnetic fields so, on cloudy nights, they rely on their internal compass. Some studies of pigeons and petrels show that they might use olfactory (odor) cues to navigate.

Not surprisingly, birds face numerous perils on their journeys and humans

keep adding new threats to the list. Communication towers and bright city lights disorient them, killing millions and exhausting millions more. Habitat destruction at key migratory stopovers leaves birds malnourished and unprepared to breed if they make it that far. Climate change is expected to flood coastal nesting and foraging habitats and disrupt the timing and availability of critical food sources, among other things.

To address these challenges, Golden Gate Bird Alliance successfully brought bird-safe building standards to the City of Berkeley. We are also responding to climate change with a focus on nature-based solutions. This approach nurtures the ability of our marshes, soils, grasslands, and forests to sequester carbon while protecting critical bird habitat. Along the way, we are scrutinizing our carbon footprint, supporting progressive policies to reduce carbon pollution while minimizing bird impacts, and encouraging our members to take action in their personal lives.

This fall, as you witness the miracle of migration, please consider how you might help these birds continue their migratory traditions for generations to come.

GOLDEN GATE BIRD ALLIANCE: A PRESIDENT'S-EYE VIEW

BY ERIC JAMES SCHROEDER

Eric James Schroeder is the past president of Golden Gate Bird Alliance. Christina Tarr is the newly-elected board president. The following is an interview between Eric and Chris—providing a window on the past, present and future direction of GGBA.

Eric: We first met in 2016 in the Golden Gate Bird Alliance (GGBA) and Cal Academy of Sciences' Master Birder class. I'm curious to know what initially brought you to GGBA and what made you agree to become the Vice President of the Board?

Christina: The year after my youngest daughter went to college, a friend saw an advertisement for Anne Hoff's beginning birding class and asked if I wanted to take it. I agreed, and that was the beginning. Once I started, it was really all I wanted to do. After about a year on the Board I agreed to become the Vice President. I wanted to understand the issues the board was facing on a deeper level. I think the issues facing the board now—how to diversify our membership, take on conservation issues, attract younger birders, and preserve habitat for birds in the future—are all really interesting issues I feel passionately about. I want to ensure our organization—and the birds we aim to protect—survive and thrive well into the future.

Eric: You've been very active on several committees this past year. What have you learned from your experiences?

Christina: That they do so much of the



Christina Tarr.

organization's work. The parts that people see are our classes, free field trips and our EcoEd program. These things are the organization's giant engine. But behind this we have all these committees that are doing all the work I just mentioned, plus conservation work and policy work.

Eric: Did you have a favorite committee this year?

Christina: The Climate Committee. When I joined that committee, I thought "This is going to take forever." The committee chair, Jess Beebe, was extremely organized. She had us doing all these exercises—jam boards and favorite bird of the week. And it worked. We came to a decision that we should focus on nature-based solutions to address climate change. That was a real committee decision.

Eric: When I became president of the

board, I knew that the big issue I faced was staffing. The second big issue I faced was completely unforeseen—COVID. What do you see as your big issue?

Christina: My big issue is hiring a new position—a Conservation Director. We need a staff person to figure out and prioritize the things we want to do and the things we're going to do.

Eric: One of our new programs last year was the Birding for Everyone initiative. We raised enough money to give scholarships to ten of the 28 applicants who wanted to take our Adult Education classes but found the cost beyond their means. As you know, the program was very successful. How do you see the Birding for Everyone initiative building on the success of this past year?

Christina: I think we've got to keep those people from this past year involved because they're great. They're so inspiring. They have such energy and new ideas, and they're exactly the people we are looking for to help bring others into our organization—we can't survive without adding people who are under 65. And we can't thrive without people of color.

Eric: What else are you hoping to achieve in your tenure as president?

Christina: Keep the organization alive. *[both laugh]* But seriously, I'm hoping that we can solidify and expand our mission. With more stable fundraising, there's a million things we could do.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Birding For Everyone Scholarship

The Birding for Everyone Scholarship application period is now open. This scholarship is designed to develop and empower the next generation of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) conservation leaders. Awardees receive free classes for a year and a one year membership. Check out our website for more information.

Berkeley Bird Festival

The third annual Berkeley Bird Festival on Sunday, October 15 is just around the corner. Save the date and begin registering for the various birding trips and family friendly activities happening this year. For more information on the festival and registration visit: www.berkeleybirdfestival.org

Christmas Bird Counts

Mark your calendar for all three of our upcoming Christmas Bird Counts this year; Richmond: December 30, 2023, Oakland: December 17, 2023, and San Francisco: December 27, 2023. Our christmas bird counts are a great opportunity to contribute important science data to support global conservation efforts.



North Lake, courtesy Janet Carpinelli.

NORTH LAKE: BIRDING HOTSPOT

BY DOMINIK MOSUR

LOCATION

North Lake, Chain of Lakes Drive at John F. Kennedy Drive, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco

In winter, North Lake often hosts rarer overwintering species.

North Lake, the northernmost lake in the Chain of Lakes on the west end of Golden Gate Park, is widely considered the single best birding destination in the park's 1,000 plus acres. It rivals all other spots in the park as a draw for western migrants and misdirected vagrants in late spring and throughout fall. Additionally, just about every one of the 40-some species recorded breeding in the park in recent years, with the exception of Great Blue Heron, nests within a few hundred meters of this site in the summer. In winter, North Lake often hosts rarer overwintering species including all three sapsuckers, orioles and tanagers, and is the only known night roost in San Francisco for the State Listed Endangered Tricolored Blackbird.

While most of the lakes in the park are entirely human-made, the Chain of Lakes including North Lake are modified versions of original, naturally formed, interdune water bodies that existed in the 1,000 acres of habitat before the park was developed. While the cypresses, eucalyptuses and pines are a new addition, historic photos from the turn of the 20th century show North Lake edged by Arroyo Willow thickets that remain

to this day. Knowing how similar sites like Rodeo Lagoon in Marin and the various creek mouth lagoons in San Mateo county pull in migrants, it is very likely that this small coastal lake has served as a stopover for winged travelers for hundreds if not thousands of years.

With its smoothly paved, relatively flat path and easy access from north and south sides of the park including by public transit, North Lake is a great destination site for just about any birder. In the fall one can expect to see good numbers of western migrants along the lakes edges including: Western Flycatcher, Warbling Vireo, Western Tanagers, and Yellow, Townsend's, Wilson's and Orange-crowned Warblers. Less common coastal western migrants like Cassin's Vireo, MacGillivray's Warbler and Nashville Warbler can be found and Northern Waterthrush is noted almost every fall and winter. The lake sometimes turns up interesting water birds like teal, rails and Red-necked Phalaropes. Later in the fall Tropical Kingbird, Black-and-white, Black-poll, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Palm, Tennessee and even Prothonotary Warblers have turned up in recent years.

Have a favorite birding site you'd like to share? Contact rnakano@goldengatebirds.org.

DONATIONS

Thank you for being a part of our donor and member community. We are deeply appreciative of every individual, business and organization that supports Golden Gate Bird Alliance. In this issue we recognize our new members from September 2022–August 2023 and all of our major donors from the past year.

Major Donors

\$10,000+

JoinBIRFA, The San Francisco Foundation

\$5,000–\$9,999

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Remember the Birds

Including Golden Gate Bird Alliance in your estate plan is a generous way to ensure that the Bay Area remains a haven for the birds you love.

A bequest can be expressed in a will as simply as, “I bequeath [a sum of money, a percentage of my estate, or an IRA, life insurance policy or investment/bank account] to Golden Gate Bird Alliance, 2150 Allston Way, Suite 210, Berkeley, CA 94704.”

Consult with your attorney to discuss your particular situation. Learn more on our website at goldengateaudubon.org/legacy.

Please know that we work hard to ensure the accuracy of this list. If your name has been omitted or misspelled, let us know at 510.843.2222.

HOW BIRDS ARE RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

MORGAN W. TINGLEY

When we contemplate how bird diversity has changed, we often focus on the handful of species we have lost entirely. While we have yet to lose a single bird species to climate change, birds and other creatures are adapting and responding in myriad ways. Across the world, species are shifting their geographic distributions, the timing of life history events, and even their body shapes and sizes. Integrating field research and citizen science, this talk demonstrates the complex ways species are responding to a changing climate.

Morgan Tingley joined the faculty at the University of California, Los Angeles in 2020, after previously serving as an Assistant Professor at the University of Connecticut and as a David H. Smith Conservation Research Fellow at Princeton University. He holds a Ph.D. in Environmental Science, Policy, and Management from the University of California, Berkeley, a B.A. from Harvard University and an M.Sc. from Oxford University.

PREY-GO-NEESH NES-KWE-CHOHL: CALIFORNIA CONDORS RETURN TO YUOK COUNTRY

TIANA WILLIAMS-CLAUSSEN

Tiana Williams-Claussen, Director of the Yurok Tribe Wildlife Department, will present an update on the newly released population of California Condor in Yurok country in Northern California, after the conclusion of the first year of initial releases. She will also discuss condor biology, their cultural importance to the Yurok people, and next steps for condor reintroduction in the Pacific Northwest.

Tiana Williams-Claussen is a Yurok Tribal member and Director of the Yurok Tribe Wildlife Department. She received her B.A. in Biochemical Sciences from Harvard University, after which she returned to serve her tribe. Instrumental to the establishment of the Wildlife Department in 2008, with California Condor recovery as its flagship project, her native upbringing and formal education allow her to bridge the gap between traditional understandings of the world, and those rooted in Western-science, supporting her in her work toward a cohesive, well-informed approach to holistic ecosystem management.

Zoom links and passcodes for upcoming presentations are available on our Speaker Series website at goldengateaudubon.org/education/speaker-series.

ZOOM

Thursday, October 12
7 p.m. program
Zoom



Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

Jerry Ting

ZOOM

Thursday, November 16
7 p.m. program
Zoom



California Condor.

Will Goldenberg, Goldenberg Film

MASTHEAD

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MISSION STATEMENT

Golden Gate Bird Alliance's mission is to inspire people to protect Bay Area birds and our shared natural environment.

ABOUT GOLDEN GATE BIRD ALLIANCE

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1 Fall Migration

Every year thousands upon thousands of birds touch down in the Bay Area during their fall migration journey.

4 New Board President

Master Birder and field trip coordinator Chris Tarr enters into her first term as Board President of Golden Gate Bird Alliance.

5 North Lake

The northernmost lake at Golden Gate Park draws western migrants and misdirected vagrant birds.

BACKYARD BIRDER



Varied Thrush.

THE VARIED THRUSH

BY ERIC SCHROEDER

The Varied Thrush is the harbinger of Halloween. This winter migrant in the Bay Area, shows up in increasing numbers throughout October and stays around until the end of March before returning to its breeding grounds in western Canada and Alaska. Its outfit of orange and dark colors also reflects the Halloween spirit. The male sports a black head with an orange eyebrow on its body

and the reverse color scheme below—an orange breast with a black band running across it. Its back and wings are blue-gray with the wings having orange highlights. The female’s pattern is similar but its colors are duller.

The color scheme separates this bird from the American Robin which it resembles in size, shape, and dining habits. During the breeding season, Varied Thrushes mostly forage on the ground for insects, but when they come south for winter, they add fruits, berries, and acorns to their diets. Reinhart Redwood Park in Oakland is a particularly good place to look for this bird since it not only features the moist forest environment these birds prefer, but it also teems with acorns and all sorts of native berries—madrone, toyon, thimbleberry. (It’s possible to find one at your feeder or on the ground foraging for earthworms in the winter!)

These birds face a number of human threats, including habitat loss due to forest fragmentation and climate change. And, according to Birds of the World, it seems particularly vulnerable to collisions with windows (Golden Gate Bird Alliance has lobbied for bird-safe building regulations in the San Francisco Bay Area.)

It’s an irruptive species, meaning its population goes through cyclic peaks and valleys, depending on food supplies. In winter it often forages in small flocks. But it’s also elusive: its coloring helps it blend into the dense undergrowth it favors in our Bay Area winter, so you’ve often got to work to see one. Where the Varied Thrush breeds, however, your chances are better. It can be located by its song, described by eBird as “a slow, haunting series of long, eerie whistles,” preparing us for Halloween.